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FOR NEA/ARPI AND NEA/PI

E.O. 12958: N/A

TAGS: [PHUM](#) [PREL](#) [KMPI](#) [KWMN](#) [KU](#)

SUBJECT: FREEDOM AGENDA: POST-FUNDED MEPI PROJECTS PROMOTE EQUALITY
FOR KUWAITI WOMEN

REF: 05 KUWAIT 4144

Sensitive but unclassified; not for internet distribution.

¶1. (SBU) Dr. Alanoud Al-Sharekh and Dr. Rola Dashti, both Kuwaiti women, have each successfully completed projects funded by a small grant under the Middle East Partnership Initiative (MEPI). Their projects seek to raise awareness of the unequal status of women in Kuwaiti society and promote their legal and political rights.

¶2. (SBU) Dr. Al-Sharekh produced a blue and white, bilingual, five-page accordion-style brochure entitled "My Life... My Rights... My Decision..." The pamphlet outlines the legal biases against women, thus highlighting the need for women to play a more active role in political and civil society and why women's suffrage is so important. Through the brochure, women and men are informed of existing laws that subjugate women such as legislation requiring women to have permission of a father/husband/guardian to apply for or renew a passport. (Note: In practice, this law is not rigorously enforced, but it does exist. End note.) The brochure seeks to correct this and other inequities by proposing amendments to Kuwaiti laws affecting women in six major areas: National Assembly Elections, Personal Status, Citizenship, Passports, Housing Law, and Criminal Law.

¶3. (U) The January 15 death of Amir Jaber and the subsequent mourning period resulted in the cancellation of a press conference to unveil the brochure, but Dr. Al-Sharekh has distributed it through various women's organizations and NGOs. It has been well-received and an official on the Publications and Censorship committee of the Ministry of Communications hailed the brochure as a "commendable" project.

¶4. (SBU) Women Network, headed by Dr. Dashti, produced a 36-page booklet, entitled, "The Role of Women in the Political Process and Deepening Democracy in Kuwait." It is a public opinion survey based on a quantitative and qualitative poll conducted in three urban electoral districts in Kuwait. It includes a narrative introduction, a discussion of the study's methodology, and a detailed presentation of the survey's main findings. One of the key findings of the quantitative survey is that "three fifths of the respondents (male and female) think that there are Kuwaiti women capable of serving in parliament". The study also reveals that "almost 70% of the women who were surveyed said that they would vote in the upcoming elections (2007)," although a key finding indicates that "most of the respondents believe that Kuwaiti women are ignorant in politics and lack political experience".

¶5. (U) The survey further identifies major areas of concern in Kuwaiti society including corruption, unemployment, the high number of employees in the public sector relative to the private sector, quality of education, conservative trends in society, security, and reducing the number of electoral districts. The document is available through several NGOs and will serve as a resource for Kuwaiti women developing campaign strategies for the 2007

legislative elections.

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